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**To Work or Not to Work:
Mothers in the Middle**

by

Kirstin O’Rielly Drabek

FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES

SKIDMORE COLLEGE
March 2009

Readers: Catherine Berheide and Penny Jolly

To Work or Not to Work: Mothers in the Middle

MALS Final Project for
Kirstin Drabek
March 2009

Working women face many challenges when they become mothers and decide to remain in the workforce. This online exhibit will explore various aspects of the dilemma that working women face today.



To Work or Not To Work:
Mothers in the Middle

Women face many challenges when they become mothers and decide to remain in the workforce. The choice of whether to remain in the workforce can be a hard decision for many mothers. With a reduced income, remaining at home can have an impact on the family's budget at a time when financial needs have increased with the addition of a new family member. Leaving the workforce can also have a long term impact on a woman's career. Remaining on the job has other challenges. Until social policies are created to support both women who have children and decide to stay home to raise their children and women who have children and decide to remain in the workforce, women will deal with these challenges.

For women who have children and are involved in the labor force, how to handle a leave from work after the birth or adoption of a child can be difficult. Most employees have access to unpaid leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act but this can be a financial strain on families. In addition, the FMLA leave is granted for only twelve weeks, which does not allow women and children a long period to adjust to their new lives together. After the birth or adoption of children, families must also find quality, affordable childcare for their child. This can be a struggle for families.

Dual-earner couples juggle the responsibilities of work and home, but, often the work of the home falls on women. The stress of work and home adds to the pressure that women feel about remaining in the workforce. Some women wish for more flexible work arrangements, such as working from home, or working part-time. Not all have access to these arrangements; the ones who do have access to them make some concessions to make use of these schedules, such as lower salaries or loss of benefits. Many dual-earner couples, but in particular the women in them, also deal with taking time off to care for sick children or elder family members. Some companies are supportive of these needs; others are

not. As if this list of challenges was not long enough, some women feel the stress and pressure of “the mommy wars,” which pits employed and stay-at-home mothers against each other in a “war” that does not allow them to come together to help enact changes for all mothers.

In 2000, 57% of women over the age of 16 were involved in the labor force.¹ This number represents 58.6% of wives, many of whom are also mothers.² Before World War II, women’s primary role in the family was the caretaker. During World War II, many women entered the labor force due to the shortage of male workers. Many remained in the labor force as job opportunities continued to expand for women after this point. In the early part of the twentieth-century, mothers typically remained outside of the workforce until their children had entered school. This pattern changed later in the century. By 2000, 58.6% of couples with children under 6 were both involved in the workforce.³ Women’s entry into the workforce has had an impact on the demographics of the country. More women are choosing to delay or forgo childbirth and some are also choosing to delay or forgo marriage.

Many women are driven to enter or remain in the workforce due to their economic situation. Today, a single salary cannot maintain a satisfactory standard of living.⁴ “In 1990, median income of dual-earner families was 55% higher than when only the husband worked - \$46,777 compared with \$30,265.”⁵ Women contribute monetarily to the family by working outside of the home. In addition, women who remain in the workforce are less likely to be vulnerable to their husband’s job loss, sickness, or to a divorce. While women make sacrifices to remain in the workforce, there are also sacrifices that they make by choosing to leave the workforce. The decision to enter or leave the labor force is a dilemma that many women face today.

¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, Tbl. DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000. <<http://censtats.census.gov/data/US/01000.pdf>>

² Rose M. Rubin and Bobye J. Riney, *Working Wives and Dual-Earner Families* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 20.

³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, Tbl. DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000. <<http://censtats.census.gov/data/US/01000.pdf>>

⁴ Phyllis Moen, *Women’s Two Roles: A Contemporary Dilemma* (New York: Auburn House, 1992), p. 27.

⁵ Rose M. Rubin and Bobye J. Riney. *Working Wives and Dual-Earner Families* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 2.

Employed mothers face multiple issues on the job. The most immediate issue that employed mothers face after the birth or adoption of a child is the amount and type of leave that they have access to. Most employees are able to use unpaid leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act. This bill, signed into law by President Bill Clinton, gives employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave after the birth or adoption of a child, to care for a sick family member, or during their own serious health condition. The employee must work at a company with 50 or more employees in a 75-mile radius and must have worked for the company for at least 12 months and 1,250 hours in that time frame.⁶ Because of the specifics of the law, employees who work at companies with fewer than 50 employees and employees who work less than 1,250 hours a year are unable to use the leave associated with this law. In addition, employees at eligible companies may have access to the leave but may be unable to afford to take off twelve weeks of unpaid time. Some states offer paid leave to their citizens; these states include California, New Jersey, and Washington. Several other states have introduced legislation to make this available to employees. President Barack Obama has also pledged to encourage states to offer paid leave and to change the FMLA to cover employees who work at companies with 25 employees or more.

Other workplace issues that employed mothers face are health insurance for dependents, time off to care for sick children or elderly family members, and time off to participate in children's school activities. Most employees have access to health insurance through their employer, although more and more employees are being asked to contribute to their health insurance costs. Some choose to opt out of insurance coverage due to the cost, leaving some children of these employees without insurance. Some companies offer time off to care for sick children through "personal days." The number of personal days granted to employees is minimal, though, and these days are also to be used for other purposes. Most companies do not offer time off for employees to participate in children's school activities. President Obama's revision of the FMLA would expand time off to cover this very purpose. Elder care is an issue that more and

⁶ "Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993," July 2008, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_and_Medical_Leave_Act_of_1993>

more companies are realizing is one that needs their attention. Seventy-five percent of employers provide paid or unpaid time off for employees to provide elder care without risking their jobs. Another 31% of employers offer information about services for elder family members.⁷

All dual-earner couples must face the issue of childcare. The most popular type of childcare is relative care with 61% of children being cared for by a relative, according to a 2005 study by the U.S. Census Bureau. The next most popular form of childcare (at 35.1%) is care at an organized care facility, such as a day care center, nursery school, or preschool.⁸ Other options for childcare include care by a nanny or babysitter, self-care, or barter. Many families struggle to find high-quality, affordable childcare. Most companies do not provide childcare support for their employees. Some companies provide their employees with access to on-site child care, vouchers to help cover the cost of child care, dependent care flexible spending accounts, or child care referral services. Without a childcare policy from the government, families face this issue alone and struggle to find solutions.

Many mothers look for flexible work arrangements that help to lessen the tension between work and family. These flexible arrangements include part-time work, working from home, flexitime, and a compressed workweek. These flexible arrangements help to make employees feel better about their jobs, which can lead to better concentration and better performance. Some of the downsides of flexible work can be lower pay, lack of benefits, and a tension between other workers who do not have access to the flexible arrangements.

Many two-earner couples, but especially employed mothers, deal with a time bind that is created by the competing demands from their work place and their home. Before women entered the workforce in large numbers, they were expected to focus entirely on their families. With 73% of mothers with children under age eighteen involved in the work force (in 2000), many more women are

⁷ "Work-Life: Prevalence, Utilization, and Benefits."

<<http://www.catalyst.org/publication/238/work-life-prevalence-utilization-and-benefits>>

⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2005.

<<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/children/011574.html>>

now juggling these demands.⁹ Many women deal with the work of the “second shift,” which includes all of the tasks associated with the home after she returns from work. Some women have help with the “second shift” work; others do not. Research does show that men are contributing more to the housework than they have previously. “In 1965, married women did more than five times as much housework as did married men, but by 1985, they did only twice as much.”¹⁰ In addition to the pressure of the second shift work, Americans must deal with the fact that they work more hours than employees in other countries. They have access to less vacation time, adding to the stress that many dual-earner couples feel.

The term “mommy war” was coined by author Jan Jarboe Russell in a 1989 article for *Texas Monthly*. Russell was describing the tension felt between employed and stay-at-home mothers. The issue of the mommy war is one that is still discussed today. Most authors who highlight the “tension” between these two groups actually question the existence of a war at all. While real tension may exist between these two groups, it can mostly be attributed to a lack of understanding on each side or a feeling that one group has it “better” than the other. Authors Deborah Shaw Lewis and Charmaine Crouse Yoest offer suggestions for changes that could help alleviate the problems that all mothers face. They believe that the role of “mother” has become devalued and isolated. Increased opportunities for interaction are key to helping mothers come together. They also believe that the image of the ideal worker needs to be reconstructed. A large problem facing society, and women in particular, is that it is impossible to be both an ideal worker and a parent.¹¹

Popular culture is defined as “the accumulated store of cultural products such as music, literature, art, fashion, dance, film, television, and radio that are consumed primarily by non-elite groups such as the working and lower classes

⁹ Arlie Hoschild. *The Second Shift* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), p. xxiv.

¹⁰ Phyllis Moen. *Women’s Two Roles: A Contemporary Dilemma* (New York: Auburn House, 1992), p. 64.

¹¹ Deborah Shaw Lewis and Charmaine Crouse Yoest. *Mother in the Middle: Searching for Peace in the Mommy Wars* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), p. 197.

(as well as substantial segments of the middle class)."¹² The portrayal of employed mothers in television and movies can reflect how the society views them. A number of television shows and movies profile employed mothers who work in high-powered careers. All are struggling to combine their worlds of work and home. The question remains are writers, producers and directors portraying how employed mothers are seen in society or are they creating dramatic characters to help them gain audiences.

The issue of employed mothers would not be complete without a real-life look into the lives of some to see how they manage the stress of combining their work and their home lives. The author profiled six twenty-first century mothers, including herself, to help illustrate some of the issues that employed women are facing. All have different stories to tell. Most are handling the challenges well, although some would not mind changing some aspect of their life, if they were to win the lottery, for example.

The issues that employed mothers face are difficult and complex. Childcare, handling the stress of juggling work and family, dealing with workplace issues, and fighting the "mommy wars." Unfortunately, the struggles that these women face are not likely to go away anytime soon. Major changes in social policy and in society's view of mothers, especially employed, would have to take place for real change to be felt. Policies needed from the government include a childcare policy and paid leave for workers. Tax policies and divorce laws also need to be reviewed so that dual-earner couples are not penalized for being in the labor force and women who remain home to care for children are not penalized for doing so during a divorce. The job of "mother" needs to be more respected so that stay-at-home mothers do not feel embarrassed about their choice. In addition, as Lewis and Croest stated, the view of the "ideal worker" needs to be changed so that people who choose to work and raise a family are able to do so without feeling as if the two roles cannot be combined.

¹² Allan G. Johnson. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000.), p. 229.

Women in the Workforce

Women's participation in the workforce has grown over the last century. Beginning most notably during World War II, women have entered the work force in rising numbers. In 1930, 11.7% of wives – and 23.6% of women - worked in the labor force. By 1991, the number had risen to 58.6% of wives – and 57.3% of women.¹ This data shows the large increase in women in the work force over the century. It also highlights the increase in wives (and potentially mothers) involved in work outside the home. By 1991, wives were employed at a higher percentage than women as a whole.

Before World War II, women's primary role was seen as the caretaker of the children in their family. If women entered the workforce, they did so after their children entered school.² In fact, in the early part of the twentieth century, women entered the workforce only as a "temporary expedient in hard times."³ There were even laws during the Great Depression prohibiting the hiring of married women so that women would not be taking jobs away from men who needed to support their families.⁴

During World War II, women entered the work force to replace male workers who were unavailable. Women were involved in all types of work including previously unconventional work for women, such as factory work in steel mills. After the war and with changes in the economy, there was an increased demand for workers in "female" occupations, such as clerical positions, and job opportunities expanded greatly for women.⁵

¹ Rose M. Rubin and Bobye J. Riney, *Working Wives and Dual-Earner Families* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 20.

² Phyllis Moen, *Women's Two Roles: A Contemporary Dilemma* (New York: Auburn House, 1992), p. 12.

³ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

As the century progressed, women's participation in the workforce during their children's younger years changed. "By 1980, the dip in women's labor force participation during the childbearing stage had disappeared. The percentage of working wives more than tripled from 1950 to 1990, from 8 million to over 29 million."⁶

With these increases of women in the workforce, society made changes that enabled women to devote more time to their role outside of the home. "As women expanded their work efforts outside the home, more and more social and economic responses supported this major transition; child care facilities expanded, stores increased their hours, the fashion industry had more work-oriented styles and the food industry promoted prepared meals and fast foods."⁷

In addition, with more women in the work force, demographic changes have resulted over the century. Most notably, the rates of women's fertility changed. In the 1955-59 period, there were 3.7 births per woman; in the 1975-1980 period, there were 1.8 births per woman.⁸ In addition, the number of divorces have risen. "Among marriages begun in 1950, approximately 30 percent have ended or will end in divorce; among marriages begun in 1970, that figure rises to almost 50 percent."⁹ In addition, more people have chosen to postpone or reject marriage and/or childbearing altogether.

These demographic changes can be linked to women's increased participation in the workforce outside of the home. Many women are choosing to delay childbirth until later in their lives when their careers have been established. Some of these women are finding pregnancy difficult at an older age, which results in low or no childbirths for these women. The increase in divorces can be attributed to women having more financial stability to withstand a divorce. These women can fall back on their successes outside of the home to help support them after a divorce. Some women have also decided not to marry at all due to the financial independence that a career outside of the home gives them.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rose M. Rubin and Bobye J. Riney, *Working Wives and Dual-Earner Families* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 14.

⁸ Kathleen Gerson, *Hard Choices* (London: University of California Press, 1985), p. 2.

⁹ Ibid., p. 250.

According to the U.S. Census of 2000, 57.5% of women – or 64,547,732 women - over the age of 16 are involved in the labor force.¹⁰ The phenomena of women who work outside of the home is not a passing trend. The increase of women in the workforce has changed the American economy as well as the society as a whole.

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, Tbl. DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000. <<http://censtats.census.gov/data/US/01000.pdf>>

Economics of Employed Mothers

For many middle class women, working outside of the home is not something that they have a choice about. The economics of this country have affected the role of the employed woman by making her income more of a necessity than it was in the past. Because of the decline of real earnings (controlling for inflation), a single salary can no longer maintain a satisfactory standard of living.¹

The income that employed women bring to the family has real impacts on their family income and their family spending power. "In 1990, median income of dual-earner families was 55% higher than when only the husband worked - \$46,777 compared with \$30,265."² As a result, dual-earner families have more spending power. "By 1987, married couple families had annual consumption of \$840 billion."³

Women in the work force need to decide if they want to have children as this will affect their career. "A Cornell University sociologist Dr. Shelley Correll found that 'mothers are 44% less likely to be hired than non-mothers who have the same resume, experience and qualifications; and mothers are offered significantly lower starting pay for the same job as equally qualified non-mothers.'⁴

What happens to women who decide to have children and leave the work force to spend more time with their children at home? Author Leslie Bennetts believes that "when women leave their job, they become vulnerable to their husband leaving them. It is difficult for women if their husband loses his job,

¹ Phyllis Moen, *Women's Two Roles: A Contemporary Dilemma* (New York: Auburn House, 1992), p. 27.

² Rose M. Rubin and Bobye J. Riney. *Working Wives and Dual-Earner Families* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 2.

³ Ibid., p. 70.

⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

gets sick, they get divorced or may be 'too old' to get back onto their career path."⁵

Not only are women with children in trouble, but married couples with children are in trouble, too. "Having a child is now the single best predictor that a woman will end up in financial collapse. Married couples with children are more than twice as likely to file for bankruptcy as their childless counterparts."⁶

The financial squeeze is on for dual-earner families. "The average two income family earns far more today than did the single-breadwinner family of a generation ago. And yet, once they have paid the mortgage, the car payments, the taxes, the health insurance and the day-care bills, today's dual income families have less discretionary income – and less money to put away for a rainy day – than the single income family of a generation ago."⁷

So, the dilemma remains – should women enter the workforce, thereby spending less time at home tending to the household and raising their children, or should women stay home and risk the financial stability and future of themselves and their families? This question remains for many middle class women across the country today.

⁵ Leslie Bennetts. *The Feminine Mistake: Are We Giving Up Too Much?* (New York: Voice/Hyperion, 2007.)

⁶ Elizabeth Warren and Amelia Warren Tyagi. *The Two-Income Trap*. (New York: Basic Books, 2003.), p. 6.

⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

Family and Medical Leave Act

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, authored by Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut, was the first bill signed into law by President Bill Clinton when he took office. The law allows employees to take unpaid leave due to a serious health condition or to care for a sick family member or to care for a new son or daughter (including by birth, adoption, or foster care).¹

Employees are entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid leave per 12 months; restoration to the same position upon return to work; protection of employee benefits while on leave; protection of the employee from having their rights under the Act interfered with or denied by the employer; protection of the employee from retaliation by an employer for exercising rights under the Act.² The law applies to employers with 50 or more employees within a 75-mile radius. The employee must have worked for the company for at least 12 months and 1,250 hours in that time frame.³

Before the bill was signed into law, it was not supported by business as many were concerned that employees might rush to take unpaid leave. Since the bill was signed into law, there have been a number of studies showing that the law has had little to no impact on business. Small businesses have had more administrative work to comply with the new regulations but, overall, the feedback has been positive from business.

Since the bill's signing, changes have been proposed by both employers and employees to make the law more effective. The Department of Labor published a lengthy FMLA revision in early 2008, "which it says would make the law more user-friendly for companies and employees."⁴ Some of the changes

¹ "Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993," July 2008,
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_and_Medical_Leave_Act_of_1993>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mark Schoeff Jr. "Democratic Leaders Oppose Revising FMLA Regulations." *Workforce Management*, March 3, 2008.

proposed by the Department of Labor include “allowing employers to request a medical recertification for FMLA leave every six months.”⁵ The proposed changes would also require employees to notify employers of an FMLA absence “prior to the start of their shift.”⁶ Other groups have offered suggestions for changes including offering paid leave, redefining what qualifies as a “serious” health condition, creating stricter guidelines for intermittent leave, giving employers more options to verify the need for time off, and expanding the number of employees that the law covers.

FMLA offers unpaid leave to certain employees. Three states – California, Washington, and New Jersey - now offer paid leave to their residents. A number of other states have introduced legislation to offer paid leave including Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, and Pennsylvania. These state-level initiatives are encouraging as most industrialized nations offer paid leave to their residents.

With the election of Barack Obama, the U.S. may see a renewed focus on family issues. The White House website lists his proposals for family issues including expanding the Family and Medical Leave Act by expanding coverage to businesses with 25 or more employees (instead of the current 50). He would also expand the FMLA to cover more purposes as well, including allowing workers to take leave for elder care needs; allowing parents up to 24 hours of leave each year to participate in their children’s academic activities at school; allowing leave to be taken for purposes of caring for individuals who reside in their home for 6 months or more; and expanding FMLA to cover leave for employees to address domestic violence and sexual assault.”⁷ In addition to the changes to the FMLA, President Obama states that he will encourage states to adopt paid leave.

In addition, Senators Christopher Dodd of Connecticut and Ted Stevens of Alaska have introduced the Family Leave Insurance Act of 2008. The bill would allow American workers to take up to eight weeks of paid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act. With Senator Ted Stevens’ recent defeat, the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Family,” < <http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/family/> .>

future of this legislation is unclear.

In other industrialized countries, the situation for families with newborn children is very different. In the Netherlands, new mothers are granted 16 weeks leave with 100% salary. Parental leave is also granted for 13 weeks with 100% salary. Before a child's eighth birthday, parents may also take advantage of 26 weeks of unpaid leave as long as they have been employed for one year. In Norway, leave is granted for 3 weeks prior to the birth and 6 weeks after with 100% salary. Italy offers new mothers a 5 month leave with 100% salary. Sweden offers new mothers 14 weeks leave, 7 weeks prior to birth and 7 weeks after birth, with 100% salary. In addition, new parents also have access to parental leave for 76 weeks; 56 weeks at 100% pay (20% is covered by the employer), 12 weeks at "a low flat rate," and 12 weeks unpaid. If leave is not taken by the father, eight weeks of this leave is lost. Even Russia offers a leave policy for new mothers. Mothers are able to take 10 weeks leave prior to the birth of the child plus 10 weeks leave afterwards, "with social payments in the amount specified by the law."⁸

The United States has a long way to go in offering the type of leave that other industrialized nations offer to their citizens. The inauguration of President Barack Obama may offer some hope that real change may come to the issue of family leave.

⁸ "Family Leave – U.S., Canada and Global."
<<http://www.catalyst.org/publication/240/family-leave-us-canada-and-global>.>

Childcare Options

Child-care is an issue that dual-earner couples with children face. The question of who should take care of their child (or children) while they are at work is a difficult one for many families. Some options include relative care, day care centers, nannies or babysitters, in-home child-care arrangements, shift work by parents, and self care. Each arrangement has its own benefits and drawbacks, and there is no one option that works for all families. Access to affordable, high-quality child-care arrangements “can relieve stress, reduce absenteeism and tardiness, and increase worker satisfaction.” The absence of affordable, high-quality child-care arrangements can have the exact opposite effect, sometimes leading to the decision to work fewer hours or not at all.¹

In 1958, almost 90% of the children of employed mothers were in the care of fathers, siblings, relatives, housekeepers, friends, or neighbors.² In the early twenty-first century, these percentages had changed a bit but family care still remained the most popular arrangement. The U.S. Census Bureau released figures in “Who’s Minding the Kids? Childcare Arrangements: Spring 2005” stating the most prevalent childcare arrangements for families. For children under age 5 whose mothers were employed full-time, the most popular type of childcare was relative care. A total of 61% of children were cared for by a relative (30% cared for by a grandparent, 25% cared for by their father, 3% cared for by siblings, and 8% cared for by other relatives).³ Care at an organized care facility, such as a day care center, nursery school, or preschool was the next most popular type of childcare at 35.1%. As it was in the 1950’s, relative care is still the most popular type of childcare, but the number of children being cared for in an organized care facility has risen.

¹ Marianne A. Ferber and Brigid O’Farrell with La Rue Allen, ed. *Work and Family: Policies for a Changing Work Force*. (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1991.), p. 74.

² Phyllis Moen. *Women’s Two Roles*. (New York: Auburn House, 1992.), p. 78.

³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Who’s Minding the Kids? Childcare Arrangements: Spring 2005. <<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/children/011574.html>>

Most companies do not provide childcare support for their employees. Some employees are fortunate enough to have support from their companies through on-site childcare facilities, vouchers to help cover the costs of childcare, dependent care flexible spending accounts, or childcare referral services. On-site childcare facilities (some with sick rooms for children who are mildly ill) are helpful to employed parents in that they take the worry and stress out of childcare since their children are close by and being cared for by a day care run, or funded by, their employer. Other employees have access to vouchers that help cover the costs of childcare. Dependent care flexible spending accounts allow employees to put up to \$5,000 in pre-tax dollars aside to cover the costs of dependent care. The money that is put aside is not subject to payroll taxes, providing a tax savings to employees. Some companies that do not have on-site childcare facilities offer employees referrals to childcare services that are recommended by the employer. These referral services help employees who are new to the area or new to parenting find a reputable and experienced childcare service for their child.

Of those mothers who work full-time, 54.7% pay for childcare. The average payment per week is \$107 for families with children under the age of 15.⁴ This figure has increased from \$73 in 1985.⁵ Many middle and upper class families are paying more than the average of \$107 per week for childcare. These families may have salaries that are larger than other families but this expense becomes a major portion of their monthly budget.

Some families – in particular, single mothers - are unable to pay for childcare at all and use a system of reciprocity to handle their childcare needs. Women receive childcare from friends and family with the unstated requirement that this same service would be granted in return to the person who originally provided childcare.⁶ Not all reciprocity in relationships involves childcare; other things such as rides, help with non-child related tasks, and even money are also exchanged.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 2004 Panel, Wave 4.

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Who's Minding the Kids? Childcare Arrangements: Spring 2005. <<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/children/011574.html>>

⁶ Naomi Gerstel, Dan Clawson and Robert Zussman, ed. *Families at Work: Expanding the Boundaries*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), p. 225.

While many options for childcare are available, the issue is still one filled with angst for many families. The choice that families make is based on cost, quality, availability, convenience and personal preference. No one option is ideal for all families. In addition, childcare needs change as children grow and enter school, and when families have more children. These changes add to the pressure and stress as there is a constant need to reevaluate and find new childcare arrangements. With the lack of childcare policy from the government, families are left to figure out childcare on their own. President Barack Obama has pledged to expand the child and dependent care tax credit, expand high-quality after-school programs, and protect against caregiver discrimination. While these are important goals, they offer just a bit of hope for families struggling with the problem of high-quality, affordable childcare.

Flexible Work Arrangements

In 2000, according to the U.S. Census, 58.6% of couples with children under the age of 6 were involved in work outside of the home.¹ This percentage represents a marked shift in demographics prompting companies to become more innovative in the way that they manage work-family issues. Prior to World War II, most families were single-earner families with the man working outside of the home and the woman working inside, dealing with the children and the household. With more dual-earner couples, responsibilities for the children and the household fall to both parents, in addition to their jobs.

In response to these extra pressures, some businesses have created more flexible work arrangements for their employees. While not available to all employees, they certainly help those who can take advantage of them. According to Uma Sekaran, "when they (employees) are able to choose their own work styles, individuals bring greater concentration to their jobs and are likely to perform better."² One such arrangement is flexible schedules, which are available to some employees through flexitime and the compressed work week. Flexitime allows employees flexibility on their arrival and departure time from work, provided that they work a core period of four to six hours each day. Employees who work a compressed work week reduce a normal five-day work week into three or four days by elongating the hours that they work per day.³

Telecommuting is another flexible work option that allows employees to work from their home. According to Phyllis Moen, "consensus is that approximately 10% of the workforce teleworked in 2000."⁴ This figure has only risen since 2000 through greater demand by both employees and businesses.

¹ "Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000."
<<http://censtats.census.gov/data/US/0100.pdf>>

² Uma Sekaran. *Dual-Career Families* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986), p. 128.

³ Naomi Gerstel and Harriet Engel Gross. *Families and Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), p. 471.

⁴ Phyllis Moen, ed. *It's About Time* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 221.

Employees favor the flexible nature of their work, while businesses save money associated with physical work environments. Information technology use by employees is also very prevalent with 42.3 % of employees using email at home to work; 35.3% who have a pager/ cellular phone for work; 67.1% who have a computer for work at home; and 14.1% who have a fax for work at home.⁵

Other flexible work arrangements include part-time work and job sharing. Job sharing allows two (or more) individuals to share one position and all are responsible for the performance results. Part-time employment represents a work week that is less than the 35-or 40-hour work-week of most typical full-time positions. This type of position allows employees to work outside of the home with a less demanding schedule so that they have time to spend with their children and tending to their household. The downsides of any of these arrangements may be lower pay, little or no benefits, fewer opportunities for promotion and lower seniority.

While flexible work arrangements are not available to all employees, they benefit the many employees who are able to take advantage of them. They alleviate some stress of the work-family relationship and help to make employees more content with and loyal to their employer.

⁵ Ibid., p. 228.

Workplace Issues

Workplace issues include time off after the birth or adoption of a child, health insurance and other benefits, sick time for family members, and time off for children's activities. Companies that offer these benefits are labeled family-friendly. These companies realize that their focus on these issues leads to more productive employees who are more committed to their employer. They experience less absenteeism and higher productivity as employees appreciate the support. In addition, these family friendly benefits enable these companies to attract and retain a high quality workforce.

Health insurance has become a luxury to which many in the country lack access to. According to *The Business Review*, 46 million Americans are currently without insurance. Another 4 million have lost their insurance since the recession began.¹ This issue is particularly important to employed parents, as health insurance for children is vital to ensure children's health from an early age. While most employees have access to health insurance through their employers (92% in medium- and large-sized firms and 94% in state and local governments), employees are being asked to contribute more and more to pay for this coverage.² Some employees opt out of health coverage due to the cost of the plans leaving some children and families without health insurance. Some employees are not eligible for health insurance because they work for small firms that do not offer health insurance.³

While the Family Medical Leave Act does offer time off to care for a child with a serious health condition, only some companies offer time off to care for a child with a mild illness. Employees are expected to use personal days to care

¹ Mary Beth Lehman. "Report: 4 million Americans lost health insurance since recession began." *The Business Review*. February 22, 2009.

<<http://www.bizjournals.com/albany/stories/2009/02/16/daily58.html>>

² Marianne A. Ferber and Brigid O'Farrell with La Rue Allen, ed. *Work and Family: Policies for a Changing Work Force*. (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1991.), p. 106.

³ Ibid., p. 109.

for sick children. “One-quarter of employers made available some personal days off.” These personal days were also to be used for handling personal business matters such as attending a funeral.⁴

Another benefit that employed mothers appreciate but don’t always have access to is a lactation room for nursing their child (if there is an on or near site child care center) or for using a breast pump. According to the 2008 Benefits Survey from the Society for Human Resource Management, 25% of employers offered lactation rooms to their employees.⁵

Many companies do not offer the specific benefit of offering paid time off for participation in children’s activities. The company, NCNB Corporation, was highlighted in *Companies That Care* for its policy instituted “in 1990 that allows its employees paid time off to participate in school activities, citing studies that show parental involvement as an important determinant of quality education.”⁶ President Obama has proposed to expand the FLMA to cover time off to participate in children’s school activities.

Many two-earner couples are struggling to juggle care for their children with the care of their parents or other elderly relatives. Elder care is not often a benefit that companies recognize or offer resources towards. The Families and Work Institute’s 2008 National Study of Employers found that many companies were recognizing this issue as one with which employees are dealing. According to the study, 75% of employers provide paid or unpaid time off for employees to provide elder care without risking their jobs. Another 31% of employers offer information about services for elder family members. In another study done by The Society for Human Resource Management, 20% of employers offer elder care referral services and 5% offered backup elder care services.⁷

These “extra” benefits offered to employees, such as elder care referral services, access to lactation rooms, and paid time off for children’s school

⁴ Marianne A. Ferber and Brigid O’Farrell with La Rue Allen, ed. *Work and Family: Policies for a Changing Work Force*. (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1991.), p. 101.

⁵ “Work-Life: Prevalence, Utilization, and Benefits.”
<<http://www.catalyst.org/publication/238/work-life-prevalence-utilization-and-benefits>>

⁶ Hal Morgan and Kerry Tucker. *Companies That Care*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.), p. 27.

⁷ “Work-Life: Prevalence, Utilization, and Benefits.”
<<http://www.catalyst.org/publication/238/work-life-prevalence-utilization-and-benefits>>

activities, do have a cost. In today's economic climate, it will be interesting to see how many of these benefits are stripped from employees for the sake of cost-saving measures. Losing these benefits would be a detriment to both employees and employers and negate the small successes that U.S. companies have had in becoming more "family-friendly."

Time Bind

Many two-earner couples, but especially employed mothers, deal with a time bind that is created by the competing demands from their work place and their home. Before women's surge into the workplace, women were able to focus almost entirely on the needs of their children and their household. With 73% of mothers with children under age eighteen involved in the work force (in 2000), many more women are now juggling these demands.¹ As a result, "time has become the new scarcity in American families." And these "time constraints in working families are experienced disproportionately by women."²

Author Arlie Hochschild coined the term "the second shift" to describe the life of an employed mother after she worked the "first shift" at her paid job. The second shift is the work of the household that happens from the time she leaves work to the time that she returns to work the next day. This work includes – but is not limited to - caring for children, preparing meals, cleaning the house, doing laundry, paying bills, doing projects around the house (if not done by their husband), and more.

Some women have help with "second shift" work from their husbands; others do not and are burdened with the weight of these responsibilities on their own. Some women do not want help with "second shift" work because they feel that work done for the home is their domain and they gain a sense of identity from that work.³ Some men do not help with the "second shift" work because they believe that housework and childcare are the responsibility of their wife no matter what her employment status.⁴ Some research shows that more men are involved with the work of the house. "In 1965, married women did more than

¹ Arlie Hochschild. *The Second Shift* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), p. xxiv.

² Phyllis Moen. *Women's Two Roles: A Contemporary Dilemma* (New York: Auburn House, 1992), p. 70.

³ Joseph H. Pleck. *Working Wives/Working Husbands* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985), p. 154.

⁴ Ibid.

five times as much housework as did married men, but by 1985, they did only twice as much."⁵

Hochschild, through her research for *The Second Shift*, found that "women worked roughly fifteen hours longer each week than men. Over a year, they worked an extra month of twenty-four hour days."⁶ This extra work affects marriages as women may become exhausted, overworked, sick and resentful. Men who share in the second shift also feel exhausted, overworked and sick. Men who do not share in the second shift feel the resentment and emotional distance from their wives.⁷

Full-time dual earner couples also must deal with their children's schedules. If a child has an altered schedule at day care or school (such as a vacation or half-day), parents must figure out how that child will be cared for during that time. The same is true if a caregiver becomes sick or if a child is sick and unable to go to daycare or school. These situations create a time bind in that parents must rearrange their schedules or find alternate arrangements for their children.

In addition to the "second shift," many dual-earner couples are struggling with other demands on their time – work or work issues that they bring home with them, caring for aging parents, and "third shift" or volunteer work. The extent to which employees allow spillover between their home and work lives influences the amount of satisfaction that they report in their home lives and work lives.⁸ More women report allowing family life to spill into their work lives, as women are viewed as the caretaker of the family's home life.⁹

Compared with other countries, Americans work longer hours and have access to less vacation time. "The average American worker puts in 1,976 hours per year, roughly equivalent to a 40-hour week for 50 weeks per year. German workers put in 1,556 hours per year, or the equivalent of 35 hours per week for

⁵ Phyllis Moen. *Women's Two Roles: A Contemporary Dilemma* (New York: Auburn House, 1992), p. 64.

⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷ Ibid., p. 197.

⁸ Uma Sekaran. *Dual-Career Families: Contemporary Organizational and Counseling Issues* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986), p. 23.

⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

less than 45 weeks.”¹⁰ In addition to working more hours, American workers are entitled to fewer vacation days. The average American earns twelve vacation days compared with four to five weeks of vacation that is standard in many European countries.¹¹ Not only do Americans earn fewer vacation days but they do not always use their entire allotment because of pressure to remain productive at work. This lack of vacation leads to feelings of burn-out and over-work.

The increase of pressures on dual-earner families, including “second shift” work, leads to a time bind. Employees feel pulled by their work lives and their home lives and these tugs and pulls leads to stress and pressure. Until there are changes in the way that American employees are required to work, such as increases in vacation time, time off for children’s activities or volunteer work, and decreases in the average work week, the stresses will remain.

¹⁰ Jerry A. Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson. *The Time Divide: Work, Family and Gender Inequality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 126.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 22.

The Mommy Wars

In 1989, author Jan Jarboe Russell coined the term “mommy war” in an article in *Texas Monthly* describing the tension between employed moms and stay-at-home moms. With more women entering the workforce, the dynamic of the fabric of the American society has shifted. In 1960, 19% of women with children under 6 worked in the labor force. By 1991, the number had more than tripled to 60%.¹ A shift has now occurred with some women remaining home and others choosing paid employment, even while raising young children. Because women enjoy many more choices, tensions can – and do - arise between women who choose different paths. Thus Russell claims, “working moms view stay-at-home moms as idle and silly, traitors in the battle to encourage men to assume more responsibility at home. Stay-at-home moms view working moms as selfish and greedy, cheating their own children out of a strong maternal bond.”²

In their book *Mother in the Middle: Searching for Peace in the Mommy Wars*, authors Deborah Shaw Lewis and Charmaine Crouse Yoest argue that boxes have been constructed for mothers to fit into. On one side is superwoman, who does it all and blazes new paths for women in the workplace. On the other side is the stay-at-home mom, who is a sweet person but people wonder what she does all day long. The reality is that neither caricature really exists and most real-life mothers are left somewhere in the middle between the superwoman and stay-at-home mom.³

The idea of the “mommy war” raises some questions. Does the “mommy war” really exist? Or is it a fictitious conflict created to keep women from joining together and demanding change? Could it even be a conflict created by the press

¹ Rose M. Rubin and Bobye J. Riney, *Working Wives and Dual-Earner Families* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 26.

² Jan Jarboe Russell, “The Mommy War,” *Texas Monthly*, July 1989. P. 81.

³ Deborah Shaw Lewis and Charmaine Crouse Yoest, *Mother in the Middle: Searching for Peace in the Mommy Wars* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), p. 33.

to draw attention to the increase of women involved in careers outside the home? Author Miriam Peskowitz believes that the “mommy war” prompts women to judge and undermine mothers who live their lives differently.⁴

Lewis and Yoest offer suggestions for changes that could help alleviate the problems that mothers face. Lewis and Yoest believe that the job of “mother” has become devalued and isolated. They believe that more opportunities need to be created for interaction with other moms and other people in stay-at-home mother’s neighborhoods.⁵ They also believe that the image of the ideal worker needs to be reconstructed. Attention to one’s family should be considered a social necessity and a prerequisite for advancement in business. A large problem facing society (and women in particular) is that it is impossible to be both an ideal worker and a parent.⁶

In addition, they believe that changes to family friendly public policies could emphasize the importance of motherhood. Divorce laws should be reformed so that full-time mothers are protected financially for the sacrifice that they make by remaining outside of the workforce.⁷ In addition, day care needs to be reformed so that it helps support women in combining their work with caring for their children.⁸

Until women debunk the idea of the “mommy war” and start working together to change perceptions and demand policies that support all women, the mommy war myth will live and women will remain further and further away from the solutions that they really need.

⁴ Miriam Peskowitz, *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005), p. 22.

⁵ Deborah Shaw Lewis and Charmaine Crouse Yoest, *Mother in the Middle: Searching for Peace in the Mommy Wars* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), p. 197.

⁶ Ibid., p. 207.

⁷ Ibid., p. 208.

⁸ Ibid., p. 211.

Employed Mothers in Popular Culture

Popular culture is defined as “the accumulated store of cultural products such as music, literature, art, fashion, dance, film, television, and radio that are consumed primarily by non-elite groups such as the working and lower classes (as well as substantial segments of the middle class).”¹ The author goes on to define popular culture as a way for elites to control those below them. When reviewing coverage of employed mothers in television and movies, the case can be made that the “elites” who control many forms of popular culture are influencing the way that “non-elites” see employed mothers. This group is glamorized in the way they handle the struggle between work and family since, typically, they have lots of resources in which to deal with the situation.

In the case of employed mothers, this group is not covered very widely in American television or movies. The examples that do highlight employed mothers typically profile middle-class, or upper-middle class, women who are trying to balance their family life with their high-powered careers. Some examples include “Lipstick Jungle,” “Desperate Housewives,” and “Sex and the City.”

The television dramas cited that include working mothers show women from upper-income levels who are balancing the tugs and pulls of working and motherhood with access to money. The issue is difficult for these women but the financial resources help to make the work-family issue not the type of problem that derails the story line. “Lipstick Jungle” is a 2008 NBC drama featuring Brooke Shields, who plays Wendy Healy, a high-powered movie executive struggling to balance her career and her family. Her marriage was tested in the series when her husband’s career took precedence over hers and she had to spend more time on her family obligations.

¹ Allan G. Johnson. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2000.), p. 229.

"Desperate Housewives" is an ABC drama that follows five friends who live in the ideal suburban world of Wisteria Lane. Lynette Scavo, played by Felicity Huffman, is a stay-at-home mom who reenters the work world when it becomes necessary for her family. Upon reentry into the work world, she struggles with a female boss who does not have children and cannot relate to the challenges that Lynette faces as an employed mother.

"Sex and the City", a drama on HBO, follows four friends as they live the single life in New York City. Miranda Hobbes, played by Cynthia Nixon, is a high-powered attorney who finds herself pregnant with her boyfriend's child. She struggles to combine her new baby and her high-powered career.

A television comedy entitled "Murphy Brown" also dealt with the issue of employed mothers. The comedy ran from 1988 to 1998 and starred Candice Bergen in the lead role. Murphy Brown was a news anchor and investigative journalist for a fictional newsmagazine called FYI. The show caused controversy in its 1991-1992 season, when Murphy Brown became pregnant but chose not to marry the baby's father. During the 1992 American presidential campaign, Vice President Dan Quayle criticized the Murphy Brown character for ignoring the importance of fathers and bearing a child alone. Quayle's comments caused a larger public discussion on family values².

Two movies that feature employed mothers are "Erin Brockovich" and "Baby Boom." "Erin Brockovich" is a 2000 movie that portrays the true-life story of the title character. Julia Roberts plays an unemployed single mother who sweet talks her way into a job as a legal assistant for a law firm. She happens upon some information that links a local company with some health problems in the area. The movie portrays her real struggles as an employed mother and the balancing act that women go through to manage their responsibilities at home and at work.

"Baby Boom" is a 1987 movie starring Diane Keaton. Diane Keaton plays J.C. Wiatt who is a successful New York businesswoman who suddenly inherits a baby from a relative in another country. Her life is turned upside down by the baby and she decides to move to Vermont for a total change of pace. One day,

² "Murphy Brown." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murphy_Brown>

she makes applesauce for the baby, which she loves. The baby applesauce is a hit and leads to a second career for J.C. Wiatt.

All of the television shows and movies described above portray employed mothers struggling to balance their work and their family lives. Most of the women portrayed are of middle-class, or upper-middle class, economic status and have the resources to “deal with” their childcare issues in a way that doesn’t upset their life too much. All women portrayed work full-time and the idea of working less or in a less stressful job does not seem to be an option. Although these employed mothers deal with the stress of balancing their work and family life, the struggle of real employed mothers does not seem to be reflected as the answers seem to come easily and the problems seem to resolve themselves at the end of the movie or television show.

Although popular culture can reflect the views of a society, it can be argued that TV and movie producers have artistic license, which allows them to portray life differently from how they see it in society. So, the question remains whether the employed mothers portrayed in TV and movies are realistic or whether their characters and stories are created simply to make a good product that will gain audiences.

Twenty-First Century Mothers

Six twenty-first century mothers were asked to describe their lives working and raising children today.

Kendall, 7, and Morgan, 5, are both in elementary school. Their mother works in a 4/5 position, which allows her to work a slightly reduced work schedule but still maintain health and retirement benefits from her employer. She works from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day (plus one long day until 6 p.m.) for a total of 28 hours per week. The schedule allows her to take her kids to school and pick them up. She feels lucky to have a flexible schedule and to both be able to spend time with her children and to really enjoy her job. Like Kendall and Morgan's mother, Elle and Parker's mother works a part-time schedule but manages childcare differently as her children are not of school-age yet.

Elle and Parker's mother is a guidance counselor at a local high school. She works a part-time schedule, which allows her to be home with her kids two days a week. Elle, 5, attends a pre-school three days a week and Parker, who is almost 3, goes to an in-home daycare that is used by many in the school district where his mother works. When both kids are school-age, they will have the same vacation schedule that their mother has, relieving some of the stress of juggling kids' and parents' schedules. If she won the lottery, she would not work in the same job that she currently works in and she would probably send her children to private school. Like the two mothers above, Fiona and Ciara's mother works part-time but does so in a different work setting.

Fiona, 6, and Ciara, 3, are cared for by their parents, a babysitter or day care (and school). Both of their parents work part-time out of home offices and divide child care responsibilities evenly. Although their mother works a part-time schedule with TeachForAmerica, she typically works 40 hours per week. Her job also entails some travel to New York, Washington D.C. and other parts of the country. If she won the lottery, she would continue to work but would look for a position that would allow her to spend the summers at home with her

children. Unlike Fiona and Ciara's mother, Davis' mother works full-time and wishes for more time to spend with her family.

Davis' mother works as the Executive Director of Piedmont Health SeniorCare in North Carolina. Davis, 6 months, spends his days with a nanny who takes care of him in his home. Davis' mother grew up believing that she would be a stay-at-home mother. Her position is a very demanding one that also involves a long commute. She doesn't get to spend much time with Davis during the week and is able to see him primarily on weekends. If she won the lottery, she would not continue working in her current position. Although she is grateful for the experience that she has gained, she feels that she sacrifices too much time with her family. Like Davis' mother, Lily and Ben's mother also works full-time and also seems to long for more time with her family.

Lily and Ben's mother works as a psychologist and a visiting assistant professor. Lily, 6, is in elementary school and Ben, 18 months, attends a day care center full-time. Their mother always envisioned working but didn't think she'd work such long hours or as hard as she does. If she won the lottery, she would spend more time involved in her outside interests like art. She would not be a stay-at-home mom but would love the flexibility to spend more time with her kids.

I am the mother of Elizabeth, 5, and Charlotte, 18 months. I began working on my Master's of Arts in Liberal Studies in January 2006 as a way to learn more about my life as an employed mom. At the time, my daughter, Elizabeth, was enrolled in a day care center full-time as I worked in a full-time job. With the addition of Charlotte and Elizabeth's entry into elementary school, I realized that a full-time schedule would be difficult for all in the family. A part-time position at my same employer became available and I jumped at the chance to change my work schedule. While downsides do exist with the new schedule (mostly related to reduced income and benefits), the new position is relieving some of the pressure in the family. I stay home with Charlotte two days a week, which allows me to spend more time with her and catching up on housework. My new schedule also allows me to take Elizabeth to the school bus and pick her up. The new situation is not perfect but has been beneficial in many ways.

I can relate to how all of these mothers feel as I have worked both full-time and part-time after I had children. For me, the benefits of working full-time were mostly related to pay and benefits. The downsides included feeling pulled in many directions and feeling like I did not have enough time to spend with my family or take care of housework chores. Working part-time gives me more time to spend with our family and more time to take care of housework chores. As a couple, we are struggling with the downsides of working part-time, in terms of feeling more pressured financially than we have been in the past. We are honestly struggling to come to terms with the luxury of having more time to spend with family and the reality of needing more income to support our family.

Women leave and enter the work force throughout their careers. Rarely are women's career paths linear. Catalyst, a group founded in 1962 to expand options for women, offers a "snapshot" of women with children under 18. They found that 49.8% of these women work full-time, 16.9% of these women work part-time and 29.5% of these women are not involved in the labor force.¹ Women's categorization in these groups often varies throughout her life and her career.

All of these mothers have found a way to make their balancing act work. Some are more comfortable with the way that they have achieved this balance than others. In most cases, their children will grow and thrive in whatever child-care situation they are in but their mothers may have guilt and second doubts about the way they are raising their children. Hopefully, these children will not have the pressures that their mothers face balancing work and family. By the time they begin raising their own families, more family-friendly options may be available to employees. If not, hopefully they will have learned something from watching how their own mothers raised them to make educated decisions about raising their own children.

¹ "Women Leaving & Re-entering the Work Force."
< <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/249/women-leaving-re-entering-the-work-force>.>

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